

THE CAPUCHIN POOR CLARES OF TRADITIONAL OBSERVANCE



Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD...

“I will allure the soul and lead her into solitude, and there, will speak to her heart” (Osee II, 14).

The Capuchin Poor Clares are contemplative religious who live in an atmosphere of silence, as God, whom they seek, is not found in turmoil, and to His Divine Majesty, no praise rises up more appropriately than in silence. They have responded to a calling which has separated them from the world. Living within an enclosure, they devote themselves to prayer and sacrifice.

Living hidden, “behind the grill”; forgotten, they forget no-one, as their mission is to praise God in the name of all humanity. They present to Him the misery of the world, that He may send His grace and transforming light. Following the words of their mother and foundress, they are “the cooperatives of God, the coadjutrices of Jesus Christ in the sublime work of the sanctification of souls; the support and strength of the weak and suffering members of the Mystical Body”.

As stated by Pope Pius XI, those who, by their vocation, devote themselves to prayer and penance, contribute more to the extension of the Church and the salvation of the human race than those who work in the field of the Father by exterior works. And Pope Pius XII called contemplatives “the most illustrious part of his flock”.



The Convent of Saint Clare, Morgon, France

The convents and monasteries consecrated to prayer are permanent witnesses to the existence of God. They are the precious jewels of Holy Church, the most pure riches of a world that hardly knows they are there. For all those trying to make sense of this world, and their lives, these convents are a light on a candlestick. The peace, joy and simplicity that reign there bear witness to the solid foundation on which the convent rests and much could be learnt there on how to build a life on an indestructible foundation. These convents are spiritual fortresses opposed to the materialism which forfeits so many good values; these are reserves of pure christianism for a decaying Christendom.

SAINT CLARE

Clare was eighteen years of age when, in 1212, Saint Francis came to preach the Lenten course in the church of Saint George in Assisi. The inspired words of the *Poverello* (the poor little man) kindled a flame in the heart of Clare. She sought him out secretly and begged him to help her that she might too live “after the manner of the holy Gospel”.



Saint Francis giving Saint Clare the habit



Saint Clare of Assisi

At the beginning of his conversion, six years prior to this meeting, while St. Francis was repairing the walls of the poor chapel of Saint Damien, God revealed to him that “Nuns will live here a life of such holiness that they will shine like a light in the whole Church”. St. Francis saw in Clare the beginnings of this prophecy’s fulfilment, recognizing her as a chosen soul destined by God for great things and foresaw that many would follow in her footsteps.

On Palm Sunday, Clare, arrayed in all her finery, attended High Mass at the cathedral... This was to be the last time that the world beheld her. That night, she secretly left her father's house, at the advice of St. Francis, accompanied by her aunt and another companion, and proceeded to the chapel of the *Portiuncula* (the first chapel occupied by St. Francis) where St. Francis, having cut off her hair, clothed her in a coarse, penitential tunic, with a white cord and a thick veil. This was the way in which the mother and foundress of the Poor Clares entered religion, vowing herself forever to the service of Jesus Christ.

For a short while St. Francis placed Clare within a Benedictine convent. Soon, Clare's younger sister Catherine (who would become St. Agnes) joined her, followed by other souls fleeing the world (as did later her mother and other sister). Before long, St. Francis had obtained a rude dwelling which adjoined St. Damien's chapel. Thus was founded the first community of 'Poor Ladies' or 'Poor Clares', as this Second Franciscan Order came to be known.



These new daughters of St. Francis served God in great poverty, strict penance and complete seclusion from the world - according to a Rule which St. Francis gave them. Though Clare was obliged under obedience to accept the office of abbess in 1215 (and thus remain for thirty eight years until her death) her love of humility found compensation in the performance of the lowliest services for her sisters. Her life was an image of the Virgin Mary's, living hidden and silent, in meekness and kindness. "When Mother Clare ordered the sisters to do anything, she commanded with such fear and humility that it amazed us" (Process of Canonisation). In spite of great physical sufferings, she set her sisters a striking example of zeal in penance and prayer. She lived "hidden with Christ in God", and though cloistered, her renown as "the chief rival of Blessed Francis in the observance of Gospel perfection" was so great that she was solemnly canonized only two years after her death by Alexander IV.

HOLY POVERTY

During her life, St. Clare had valiantly defended her Order's essential Franciscan characteristic - devotion to holy poverty - to be stripped of all possessions so as to possess God alone. Holding Jesus as her unique treasure, she embraced this virtue in a manner absolute. Modelling her life on His, she devoutly imitated His privations, hardships and detachment from all things under heaven, which drew even the admiration of the Sovereign Pontiff. After petitioning Holy See, she obtained from Innocent III "the privilege of Most High Poverty", which allowed the Poor Clares to not own any property (other than their convent) and to receive no fixed income. Thus, they could live completely abandoned to the hand of Divine Providence - depending on the alms and charity of the faithful, for whom they offered daily prayers and penance. Two days before the death of St. Clare, Innocent IV confirmed her own Rule which she had left to her daughters.



‘CAPUCHIN’ POOR CLARES

Other convents were founded in imitation of St. Damien’s. Over time however, many departed from their original Rule and a reform was needed to return to the Order’s primitive ideal of High Poverty. In France, God raised up Saint Colette of Corbie (XVth century), who was appointed by Benedict XIII to reform the whole of the Order. She founded 17 new convents as well as reforming many others, to which, in addition to the Rule of St. Clare, she gave her own specific Constitutions - which explained and clarified certain points of the Rule. (These were confirmed by Pius II.) This was the origin of the ‘Colettine’ Poor Clares.

In Italy, in 1560, the Venerable Mother Mary-Lawrence Longo founded a convent of Franciscan nuns whose direction was entrusted to the Capuchin friars (one of the three branches of the Franciscan family). The Capuchins instructed the religious to follow the primitive Rule of St. Clare, along with Colettine Constitutions - which the Capuchins had adapted - thus forming the first ‘Capuchin’ Poor Clare community. One characteristic of the Capuchin branch is that their ‘Most High Poverty’ has been extended to include not even owning their own convent.



An altar in honour of the Sacred Heart. The Poor Clares have a particular devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Passion of Our Lord

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CAPUCHINS OF TRADITIONAL OBSERVANCE

The Vatican II Council resulted in vast reforms to the Capuchin Order’s Constitutions, rendering it impossible for religious to continue living according to their Rule and the ideals laid down by St. Francis

and St. Clare. Consequently, Rev. Father Eugene (Capuchin from the Province of Lyon, France, 1904-1990) parted from his community, and in 1972 founded a small community of friars in Verjon (Ain, France). As the numbers of this new religious family increased, Providence placed them amongst the vineyards of Morgon (Rhône), at what was to be the Friary of St. Francis.

In response to interest which had been shown towards the Poor Clare vocation, in 1989 the Capuchin friars acquired a modest property which they named the *Portiuncula*, close to the friary, with the view to accommodating the first Poor Clare aspirants. In 1990, the first five aspirants presented themselves to the Father Guardian, who, for their initial formation sent them to a traditional community of nuns for two years. The time having passed, the postulants returned to Morgon, where they were lodged temporarily at the Portiuncula, along with Sister Mary-Isabella of Jesus Crucified (Colettine Poor Clare from Normandy, 1913-2001) who, after having left community due to modernism, found her way to Morgon where she was happy to join this new foundation.

After a novena to Rev. Father Viktricius in January 1993 (Capuchin of the Province of Bavaria, died in the odour of sanctity, 1842-1924) a vine grower's house, just ten minutes by foot from the friary, became available and was acquired. Thanks to the friars' devotion and their benefactors' generosity, the house was transformed into the Convent of Saint Clare, and in August 1993, the Poor Clares of Morgon left the Portiuncula to settle there. The solemn benediction of the convent and cloister took place in 1995.



Building work on the vineyard house



The new convent up and running

THE LIFE OF A CAPUCHIN POOR CLARE

The law of the sisters of St. Clare is the Gospel, prayer is their life and being together is their joy, though none of these can be reached without effort and all the self-denying that Jesus asks from his followers. Their common vocation, prayer and ideal is real simplicity of heart and the love which goes beyond all differences of temperament, culture, race and age, linking them in Christ. Always ready to help one another, they gather daily for a half-hour recreation where they exchange fraternally their ideas and experiences, and enjoy, in simplicity, and at times in laughter, music and song, the grace of being together.

The Poor Clares observe a strict 'grand silence' for half an hour each afternoon and from 7:30pm until after Mass the following morning. The remainder of the time is protected by an 'evangelical silence' which banishes useless conversation and imposes speaking in a low voice.

There is an atmosphere of solitude, each nun having a cell at her disposal, though their life is communal and familial. Charity is given free rein, for as St. Clare says, echoing St. Francis, "If a mother loves and nourishes her son according to the flesh, all the more should each of you love and nourish your sister according to the spirit". In this atmosphere one's personality blossoms freely. The Franciscan Rule, if it tends to making every sister a saint, loves them, however, as all very different, as St. Francis was very

different from his shy “little lamb” Brother Leo. They enjoy a certain amount of free time to use as best suits them personally, all, of course, under obedience - the principal requirement of the religious life.



Fruit picking



Gardening

To magnify God, to thank Him and to live as a continuous offering to Him is the wish of the Poor Clare. This spirit of praise and gratefulness, so characteristic of the Franciscan soul, has its first expression in the recital of the whole of the Divine Office (the Church’s official prayer) by the choir sisters, who, vigilant, rise at midnight for Matins. Over the sleeping cities, assailed more violently at this hour by the spirits of darkness, the victorious “Vox Ecclesiae” (Voice of the Church) resounds, and the Church, with motherly care, casts her immense protection of prayer over her children. Lay sisters, who are not called to recite the Divine Office, say the Office of the Pater.

The centre and summit of the Poor Clare’s day is the Mass, celebrated each morning at the convent by a Capuchin Father. Here, at the foot of the Cross, in union with Our Lady, the sisters offer themselves with the Divine Victim, collecting up His Precious Blood for the purification and sanctification of themselves and of all mankind. Nourished by this heavenly mystery, they draw the strength, light and zeal needed in their day to day combats over self and in their acquisition of the spirit of Christ.

Two hours a day are spent before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, where, in the silence of her soul, the Poor Clare adores and unites herself to the desires and dispositions of the Heart of Jesus. Above all, she seeks to respond to His sorrowful call, echoed from Calvary, “I looked for one who would console me, but found no-one” (PS 68), hence she returns love for Love, loving Him for all those who love Him not. Devotions and prayers said in common include the rosary, litanies, and the stations of the cross. No particular form of mental prayer is imposed and spiritual reading is included in the nuns’ daily time-table, books for which can be chosen from the convent’s library.



Reading of the Martyrology



Stations of the Cross

“Orare et Laborare”, “Pray and Work” - is the nuns’ life as well as the friars’. St. Francis said in his testament “I worked with my hands and I want to continue working; I firmly wish that all the friars work in honest occupations”. Diligent work forms part of the normal penance of the Poor Clare, as for all poor people. Their work includes: sacristy duties, sewing (priest’s vestments, sacristy linen, habits), sandal making, book binding, the fabrication of religious items (statues, rosaries etc.), gardening (maintenance, flowers, fruit and vegetables), cooking, laundry, chant practice (for sung masses and ceremonies) as well as secretarial work and the general upkeep of the convent. Works more particular to the Poor Clares of Morgon include the making of the Saint Joseph scapulars (the community are consecrated to St. Joseph) and the Franciscan Third Order scapulars. Also, the ‘Grain of Saint Colette’¹- a long-standing Poor Clare tradition to obtain a happy birth.

While at work, the sisters keep their glance turned towards the blessed abode of Nazareth endeavouring to continue the Holy Family’s life of silence, charity and the practice of the humble virtues of each day. Like the house of Nazareth, they desire their convent to be a sanctuary of the divine presence, a lamp burning perpetually for God, an oasis for Our Lord – where He finds Himself honoured and His father glorified.



Library



Sacristy



Vestment repairs



Book binding

The regular “chapter of faults” (the accusing oneself in community of one’s external faults regarding the observance of the Rule) nourishes the humility of the Poor Clare. Mortifications such as the daily fast, perpetual abstinence (from meat), straw mattresses, walking bare-footed (except during cold temperatures) and other penances assist the nun in the renouncement of self while making her prayer more efficacious - prayer and penance being inseparable. St. Clare implored her daughters “Never forget that you are espoused to a crucified Saviour”, hence, their sacrifice and penance is carried out in a spirit of reparation, in imitation of and in union with their Redeemer, Lord and Spouse. If the Franciscan Rule seems austere, it is at the same time all merciful, allowing a gradual adaptation to the Rule and it dispenses in times of necessity.

VOCATIONS TO THE CAPUCHIN POOR CLARES

Aspirants should have a great desire to develop a life of prayer and union with God. “She needs a great heart, large enough to embrace the needs of the whole world; delicate enough to live joyfully and peacefully with all her sisters; strong enough to follow Christ on the way of the Cross; and so open to His grace that the Virgin Mary’s ‘Fiat’ may always find an echo in her. Then she will know that it is in losing one’s life, that true life is found; that the deepest joy comes from union with the living God; and that spiritual motherhood is given to those for whom Christ is all”.



“O ye ice and snow, bless the Lord: Praise and exalt Him above all forever” (Dan. 3,69)

The postulant should be physically healthy (without needing to be extraordinarily robust), have a good psychological balance and a good temper. The aspirant accepted to live in the enclosure will, after a time of ‘pre-postulancy’, begin her postulate (6 months minimum). Then she will receive the habit of the Order with a white veil and begin a two year novitiate. (The minimum age for a postulant to enter the novitiate is 18.)



Clothing ceremony: a postulant receives the habit



Novice mistress and novice

A mistress of novices is assigned to watch more particularly over each novice, to teach and guide their conduct, while initiating them into the monastic customs - in preparation for the temporary vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and enclosure which they will take at the end of their noviciate. Their temporary vows will last for three years, at the end of which they are renewed - lasting in total for at least six years, after which, the religious is admitted to solemn vows.

By her vows, the religious professes before the Church and the world that she belongs to Christ. Henceforth, all her actions, down to her most obscure and lowly 'services', belong to the Church and are raised to 'acts of worship', producing by them an unsuspecting force - which obtains grace for souls, while "filling up what is wanting to the sufferings of Christ" (St. Paul, Col. I, 24). Even the liturgical prayer she performs is no more a personal prayer, but becomes the prayer of the Church - said with the whole of creation in the name of the Church. Such is the privilege of the religious state over all others.



Solemn profession ceremony: the future professed lies in prostration under the pall during the litany of the saints.



The newly professed, crowned with thorns, receives communion.



The 'parloir' (visiting room)

Confession and spiritual direction are provided to the nuns by the Capuchin Fathers.

Generous souls, listen to the words of St. Clare: “Our labour here below lasts but a while, while the reward is eternal... Don't let yourself be taken in by the false appearances of a deceitful world” (Letter to Ermentrude).

Interested persons may write to the Mother Superior. A guest room is attached to the convent where aspirants may stay, though reservations must be made in advance.





The Immaculate Virgin is the Patron and Queen of the Seraphic Order and the Divine Shepherdess of the community (the community are consecrated to Mary, who they hold as their true Mother Abbess)

Daily timetable of the community

12 : 00 am	Matins
4 : 35 am	Rising
5 : 00 am	Lauds, Adoration, Prime, Terce, Holy Mass
8 : 00 am	Frustulum (light breakfast) Free-time
8 : 30 am	Spiritual reading
8 : 50 am	Obedience (work)
10 : 55 am	Sext and None
11 : 35 am	Dinner
12 : 55 pm	Recreation
1 : 25 pm	Free-time / siesta Grand silence (1/2 hr)
2 : 00 pm	Vespers and Rosary
2 : 40 pm	Obedience (work)
5 : 30 pm	Compline and Adoration
7 : 00 pm	Light supper
7 : 15 pm	Pardon (final prayers) Grand silence (until 8 am) Free-time
8 : 15 pm	Lights out

FRUITS OF THE SERAPHIC ORDER

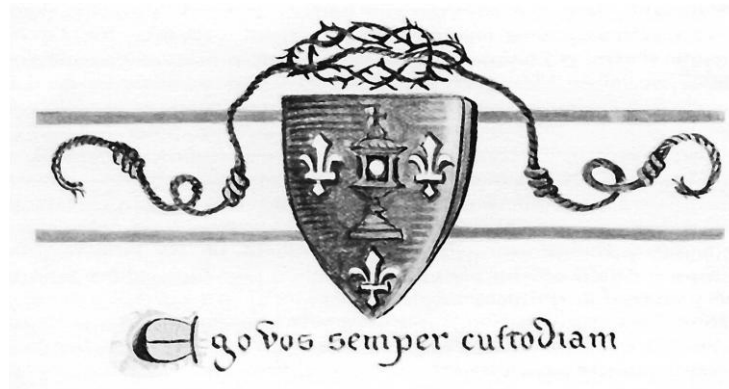
The Seraphic Order (The Franciscan Order) is said to count more saints than any other Order (over 400 saints and blessed). Here are a few of the fruits harvested from the Capuchin Poor Clare branch:

- Saint Veronica Giuliani († 1727)
Italian, who received revelations from Our Lord, as well as the stigmata.
- Blessed Florida Cevoli († 1767)
Italian, humble disciple of St. Veronica and abbess of the same convent.
- Venerable Sister Mary-Consolata Betrone († 1946)
Her mission was to spread the “little way of love”, taught to her by Our Lord Himself, through the practice of an unceasing, smiling and confident “Jesus, Mary, I love you, save souls”.

Among the Capuchin Friars Minor:

- Saint Lawrence of Brindes († 1619)
Apostolic and marial Doctor of the Church. Grand mystic and humble “minister and servant of all his brothers”.
- Saint Leopold of Castelnuovo († 1942)
Croatian. “Hero of the confessional”.
- Saint Pio of Pietrelcina († 1968)
Italian, the first stigmatized priest. His motto: “Pray, hope and don’t worry”.

*For further information write to:
Monastère Ste Claire, Morgon, 69910 Villié-Morgon, France*



Arms of the Order of St. Clare

1 St. Colette received a special gift of protection for those who had recourse to her to obtain a happy birth. The ‘Grain’ consists of a relic of St. Colette wrapped in a prayer written by herself, which is to be swallowed by expectant mothers for St. Colette’s assistance.